



## ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

## History

### WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND CINEMA: ANALYSING THE TREND OF 2010s

**KEY WORDS:** Cinema, Bollywood, Women Empowerment, Women, Film makers, Gender Issues, Social initiatives, Entertainment, Women Protagonist

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#### ABSTRACT

Indian cinema has depicted itself in a significant way in recent years out of its glorious century, by not limiting itself to a mere source of entertainment, but experimenting towards presenting socially and political issues, thus having a stronger impact on audiences. Bollywood movies since its evolution usually centred on 'male heroism' where a man rescues and comforts the vulnerable and helpless female character and takes responsibility to fix all problems. Women initially were with the men only to beautify the movie and to have a diversity in the cast. Looking back at our present and current history, the most productive and 'box office breaker' Bollywood films have a male superstar in the lead role. However, looking at the recent trends in Bollywood we can see that there is a small shift from the typical movies to a new kind of women oriented cinema. Slowly but surely the fraternity of the film is verifying itself on social issues and is ready to take on the challenge of making known to the public through women oriented films. However, a large part of the filmmakers still follows the traditional formula of filmmaking, which may be detrimental to the public. This Research Paper aims to address and highlight a couple of popular Bollywood movies in the 2010's that emphasised on Feminist approach and Women Empowerment socially culturally, politically and globally while having a lasting impact on the audience and at least making them think about making a change in society. This articles also applauds the social initiatives taken by the entire cast and crew of the film to mirror the society on an entertainment medium and by breaking the age old stereotype of women only being a dotting housewife. This Research further shows the genre's success and encourages budding young filmmakers and media workers to bring social issues into the mainstream by developing aspects 'feminist empowerment' genre and by highlighting the real-life side of the reels.

#### INTRODUCTION

We believe that cinema means entertainment that guides the audience to a world that is completely different from the reality, that is, a world where they can escape from the tiredness of everyday life. Film is a mass-consumed medium that plays an important role in forming opinions, composing images, and strengthening dominant cultural values. With its diversity and scope, film is the most effective tool for understanding and communicating social norms, attitudes, and cultural and behavioural derivatives to audiences. This treatise describes the representation of female characters in a couple of 2010's films that highlighted social challenges and empowered women with different perspectives.

Women are in majority compared to its population, and therefore the depiction of women on the screen is important to foster stereotypes that already exist in society, so it is appropriate to consider this issue. This treatise begins an introduction to Indian Cinema, discussion of the field of feminist film criticism, limitations and also takes a few glimpse from the popular films to analyse the depiction of women in women- centred films.

Media, identity and gender issues are being discussed everywhere today. They became essential in the field of media studies. The mass is the popularity and diversity of media as a source of mass consumption, and its impact on the construction of ideas and the generation of discussions. The media structure and the system have also been greatly changed by privatization and globalization. So these advances could affect how the media investigates and covers all issues. Gender is an important issue. In this paper, an attempt was made to investigate the relationship between women and the popular Hindi films. In a very clear way, the film is shaping the cultural, social and political values of the people of this country.

These film's feminist approach is about how women are represented on the screen, how women's issues are dealt with in the film, what feminism means to filmmakers, and the feminist agenda.

#### AIMS

- To understand the Portrayal of Feminist Approach of

#### Women Empowerment in Hindi Cinema in the 2010's

#### OBJECTIVES

- To analyse the relation between Women and Films
- To encourage budding and young filmmakers to work on gender issues
- To break stereotypes about Women in the Indian society
- To highlight hidden message from Women oriented films
- To throw light on Indian women's' capabilities, power and courage

#### INTRODUCTION TO INDIAN CINEMA

Indian cinema is the largest producer of feature films in the world, producing between 800 and 1,000 films a year, twice the number that Hollywood is making (Sridhar and Mattoo, 1997). "Bollywood", which has a substantial market share in the Indian film industry, with a focus on Hindi films, was headquartered in Bombay, now Mumbai. In addition, films are also produced in regional languages including Bhojpuri, Bengali, Marathi, Gujarati, Tamil.

Hindi films have become an important milestone in Indian culture in this century. It shapes and expresses the ever-changing scenes of modern India to an extent that the early art forms could not achieve. Hindi movies and entertainment are interrelated. The Hindi film obviously opens a very useful window for understanding a culture. By studying the culture, one can gain a deeper understanding of the customs, behaviour patterns, values, arts and crafts, and daily life of the people living in that culture.

Indian films are the largest medium of communication with the people across the globe. Considering that the film industry entertains a huge population, about 12 million people watch movies in cinemas and theatres every week. Now the question arises, what is this movie industry made by and by whom? The Mumbai film industry is a male-dominated industry. Women engaged in occupations in the industry are mainly actresses or playback singers, side dancers, etc. In recent years, this trend has changed, women have become choreographers, costume designers, editors and screenwriters. To name a few, the greatest contribution by women in this field is given by Saroj Khan, Meghna Gulzar, Zoya Akhtar, Gauri Shinde, Anvita Dutt Guptan who have

given us Real and Relatable stories and have highlighted Gender Challenges and Inspirational stories through Entertainment medium. However, compared with their male counterparts, their count in the industry is much smaller.

Films play a dual role in reflecting the society they serve, but they are also important in shaping and influencing society. Since the founding of the Indian film industry, fraternity films have strived to convey social messages through experimentation with various genres. Sometimes these tests fail, while in others they attract such a large audience that they reach new heights at the box office.

**Table.1 List of Movies discussed**

Sr no	Year	Movie	Director	Female Lead	Movie Highlights
1	2012	Kahaani	Sujoy Ghosh	Vidya Balan	Reference to Indian Goddesses 'Durga' and 'Shakti'
2	2012	English Vinglish	Gauri Shinde	Sridevi Kapoor	Age and Gender barriers
3	2013	Queen	Vikas Bahl	Kangana Ranaut	Gender imparity
4	2014	Mardaani	Pradeep Sarkar	Rani Mukherjee	Sex trafficking, child trafficking
5	2018	Raazi	Meghna Gulzar	Alia Bhatt	Spy, Patriotism

### 1) KAHAAANI (A MOTHER OF A STORY)

The movie starts with Kolkata being abuzz with the preparations for the annual Durga Puja festival and a seven month pregnant woman Vidya Bagchi (Vidya Balan) is looking for her missing husband (Arnab Bagchi) in this bustling city but is unable to find any help and support in a male dominated society. If we look at the Kahaani poster by Sujoy Ghosh, we see Vidya Balan standing in front of Durga Maa's Murti. It shows that she is a divine character in the film. Like the goddess, it gives the impression that she is also a symbol of truth and "Shakti" (strength). This performance is confirmed, especially in the last moments of the film. We see Vidya wearing a white sari with a red trim and a red blouse. In addition, she has a red dot on her forehead to showcase her bravery. These colours are traditionally worn during Durga Puja, highlighting the culture of the state and the festival. During the climax, we see her expression change from that of a shy and vulnerable woman to that of an angry vigilante. Her loose hair, fierce black eyes and haughty body language is a true reflection of a goddess. One eye-catchy line from the song 'Ekla Cholo re' in the movie which sums up the protagonist's role goes as

*"Jodi Tor Dak Shune Keu Na  
Ase Tobe Ekla Cholo Re"*

Translation- "If no one responds to your call, then go your own way alone"

(Bengali patriotic song 'Ekla Cholo' written by Rabindranath Tagore in 1905. Sung by Amitabh Bachchan)

This song is the main climax of the movie where the female Protagonist goes ahead to fight her own challenge all by herself.

### 2) ENGLISHVINGLISH

Empowerment doesn't necessarily mean fighting for your rights, it also means finding ways to improve yourself. English Vinglish is the story of an Indian housewife Shashi Godbole (Sridevi) which beautifully shows how a housewife, a good homemaker and a mother, is belittled and ridiculed and

mocked by her daughter and husband because she cannot speak the language of the Queen, i.e English fluently. The traumatized Shashi Godbole turns the situation around when she learns the language in her late 30s and empowers herself by not keeping age as a barrier to be able to venture into new things on her trip to America for her niece's wedding. She however earns self-respect in the process and challenged all the obstacles that came her way. By the end the movie, she aces the language and raises the toast in English even then, she still choses to be humble and forgiving towards her family, highlighting the role of every woman in an Indian household. Gauri Shinde's simple yet effective story makes a lasting impression as a woman overcomes her flaws when challenged by the society. The song 'Gustakh Dil' sums up Shashi's unfamiliar surroundings that she's placed in with new people, new dialects and differing cultures and the way she is trying to make peace with it.

### 3) QUEEN

"Queen" is one of the rare Bollywood movies that portrays a realistic story but still manages to make the audience entertained. This movie is about a girl, Rani (Kangana Ranaut), who was abandoned by her fiancé just the day before the wedding. Being a simple girl from a typical Punjabi background, Rani decides to go on her honeymoon alone instead of sulking or crying over her fate. The beauty of this movie lies in the interpretation of real and obvious emotions. From a girl who was scared in a foreign land to a strong girl who fought back when someone tried to rob her, this movie successfully proved it all.

This film subtly highlights the gender differences that prevail in Indian society. A well-educated girl left a good job because her boyfriend did not want her to work. Although this film is a good show of the basic reality of India, where many girls sacrificed their careers for their families, it also shows the spirit of a real Indian woman who fights against the injustice she has suffered. The transition from a simple girl who knows nothing about the outside world to a bold and smart street woman who travels through various countries is undoubtedly the highlight of this movie.

This movie even throws light on being a single mother where you can have fun in life, dance, go ahead with your choices or do whatever pleases you and still be a doting and caring mother. It further concludes that you won't realise what you're good at if you don't make an attempt to explore new things, clothes are something you define than it defining you, it teaches us that you can wear what you want to wear and do your hair the way you like and that you definitely don't have to look the way society wants you to and finally by living in an Indian society where your neighbours are more inquisitive about what you do, or rather are than your family, it gives them a message that it's alright to befriend someone from the opposite gender and that you're a master of your own life and you need to hold your self-esteem and give men a taste of their own medicine as a women is independent of her own decision.

### 4) MARDAAANI (BRAVE LADY)

Shivani Shivaji Roy (Rani Mukherjee) plays the role of a police officer. She is brave, smart and dedicated to her profession. A profession where men outnumbered and preferred due to their masculinity, Rani clearly gives justice to her role and uniform. As the title of the movie goes, this movie is way different from the remaining mainstream action films. It touches a very sensitive subject and raises voice against something that happens every day in our country, child trafficking. This film has outlined what you get to see what a woman can do if triggered and pushed to her limits and defined the philosophy that being a woman in India you've got to fight your own battles as the society can provoke you to go weak on your knees. The theme song spotlights the anger of a triggered women

*"Jis duniya mein maa behne  
Rishte nahi, gaali hain  
Us duniya se maryada ke rishte saare todungi  
Kadam mila ke dekho to  
Main saath me tere chal doongi  
Par chhed ke dekho tum mujh ko Main tum ko nahi chhodoongi"*

(Song: Mardaani Anthem, Lyrics- Kausar Munir, Singer- Sunidhi Chauhan)

Translation- The world in which mother and sister are not relations but abuses

(as in, where there are more abuses in their name)  
I'll break all the relations of dignity etc. with that world.  
Try and match steps with me,  
and I'll walk along with you.  
but try and tease me,  
and I'll not leave you..

the lyrics of this song convey anger and frustration of an abused women but also inner strength that the female gender possesses.

### 5) RAAZI (GO ALONG WITH)

If we had ever seen Sehmat (Alia Bhatt) in real life, no one would have imagined her as a spy in the real world. The film begins with Sehmat a Kashmiri woman who agrees to marry a Pakistani army officer in order to spy on Pakistan during the Indo-Pakistan War of 1971.

Although not a professional spy, she is courageously trained to become one and fulfill her duty towards her country. But even when Sehmat becomes a spy, that shyness in her remains constant throughout the film. Besides the aspect of a 'SPY', we also see Sehmat try her hand at the role of a daughter-in-law, wife and daughter, which shows that a woman can perform many tasks with ease. Since the film is based on a true story, it invites the audience to think about how many unsung heroes, the women in society dedicate their lives to their country who are barely talked about. Moreover, this feminist sentiment is further reinforced as Raazi is directed by one of the best female directors in India, Meghna Gulzar.

*"Gurpech hai raahein jeene ki  
Kismat ik tedhi baazi hai  
Tum haath pakad lo iraade ka  
Raah seedhi hai agar dil raazi hai  
Agar dil raazi hai"*

Translations- The paths of life are all tangled up  
Destiny is a tough bet  
Hold the hand of your intentions  
The path will become straight if your heart agrees  
If your heart agrees

(Song: Raazi title track, Lyrics- Gulzar, Singer- Arijit Singh)

### LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The Bollywood mainstream and parallel cinema is dispersed throughout a variety of social issues at various levels of feminist approach and gender issues necessitating the discussion of at least one film per issue. Illiteracy, gender bias, the right to equality, the Indian political system, same-gender relationships, child abuse, female infanticide, rape culture, honour killing and general crime against women are all social issues that need to be addressed and stand to be absent in this research paper. Many more may be outside the scope of this study's investigation. These films made a hit at the box office, along with their meaningful songs.

### CONCLUSION AND FUTURE STUDIES

The study effectively demonstrates how cinema influences

and shapes the social norms of the audience and instilled the spirit of bravery and hope among women by cutting the edge of gender barriers. Multiple films later and before the given time frame

Future studies pertaining to the specific research may look at covering a wider range of social issues and by highlighting feature films in the limelight or can even look at films that were released on social media platforms but have failed to get the attention that it deserves. Audience acceptance in these movies play a great role as it challenges the male dominating stigma. Our actions as audience should encourage the mushrooming movie makers to create magic on screen and highlight social challenges towards women that creates a benchmark to a new beginning. On the whole, these are just a few Bollywood films which truly champion woman empowerment. So, given that female-oriented movies are on the rise, one hopes that this progressive turn in Indian cinema continues.

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